
Operations Director Report: 1 January–31 December 2024

This is my third annual report for Otter Housing Association (OHA). 2024 has seen the manifestation of all the hard work put into applying for Federal and Provincial governmental grants during the previous year. Six grants totalling over \$2.7million were confirmed this year of which one grant of \$1.17million was conditional on achieving certain criteria. This income enabled OHA to employ our Community Project Director full time from April in order to keep abreast of the increasing workload. OHA has secured every grant it has applied for over the last three years. Competition for these grants, both nationwide and within Newfoundland & Labrador, has been intense which confirms that our project is increasingly well regarded by the various funding bodies.

OHA's Board saw the retirement of one member at the AGM in May and the reappointment of the remaining four. In August we were delighted to welcome a new Board member who had recently moved into the Port Rexton area to live and work. She has proved to be an enthusiastic and able addition to OHA's Board who continue to meet monthly. After reviewing matters of governance with respect to the Board I am pleased to recommend that the current structure is maintained.

Our Community Project Coordinator, Olivia, is the mainstay of the organisation—continuing her responsibility for the day-to-day running of the organization. Apart from the continued grant-writing, project monitoring and reporting, communication, accounting, design work and networking she has had a key role in implementing a number of HAF project initiatives. She has been supported in this role by myself and the Board. In February we received a small grant of \$5k from the Community-Led Housing Fund, administered by Reclaim, as a very welcome bridge to enable us to continue working until one of the main grants was received.

In August we were delighted to acquire the deeds to the 4 acres of land generously donated to the project by John and Peggy Fisher of Fishers' Loft, Port Rexton. The first phase of construction of the new road to OHA's land at the end of Batson's Road was completed enabling easier access to the property. The community at large was invited to an information session at the Town Hall in October where many local inhabitants were introduced to the project's mission, history and accomplishments. This was followed by a forthright Q&A session.

The Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF) project funding of nearly \$900k was confirmed in March. This was awarded to the Town of Port Rexton but applied for and administered by OHA. A Project Management Team was established in May as the decision-making body—consisting of two representatives from OHA and two from the Town who meet bi-weekly to review the project. This has contributed to the smooth running of the HAF project and achieves one of the project's stated initiatives. Apart from a substantial grant towards the capital cost of the co-housing development, HAF requires the Town to complete four further initiatives: Batson's Road infrastructure, planning policy changes, a climate action plan and research and dissemination of modular housing techniques. Work is well underway in all these initiatives. In October we enjoyed a visit from representatives of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) who are responsible for overseeing the project. We were encouraged by their enthusiasm for our project.

Our \$347k funding from the Provincial Department of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills under their Innovative Approaches to Newcomer Housing Fund was finally confirmed in April and we had a very engaging and productive visit from their representative in July.

The design development phase of the project where we work with our architects and engineers to design the co-housing development finally began in earnest in November. This was preceded by the approval of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) Study Grant for Sustainable Affordable Housing of \$250k and a \$50k grant from the Community Growth Fund administered by the Community Housing Transformation Centre (CHTC). Woodford architects has assembled an experienced team of engineers and consultants to assist with the design process. In revisiting the original design concept from the year before it was decided to simplify the project by establishing a number of discrete buildings rather than attempt to create one large one as initially envisaged. One of the primary factors was to create a fully accessible housing development without the use of elevators. We realised that design is an iterative process and are looking forward to fully participating in this exciting process next year. As a welcome outcome of last year's tour of co-housing communities in the UK we received some very helpful architect's drawings from ChaCo in Leeds.

After initially thinking that we were not in a position to apply for the NL Provincial Affordable Rental Housing program we were encouraged to apply and this resulted in a very speedy conditional acceptance grant of nearly \$1.17million. Our application was warmly welcomed!

In order to prepare for the design development and construction phases of the project Olivia and myself participated in the 9 week *Structures* online interactive course hosted by Cahdco as part of their *Toolbox+* suite of courses devised to assist affordable housing developers. This provides us with practical project management skills essential for the next phases of the project.

One of my responsibilities as Operations Director is to annually evaluate the performance of the organization in achieving its mission and objectives. I can wholeheartedly assure the Board that Otter Housing Association is fulfilling its mandate and has achieved everything it set out to within this period of time.

David Ellis

9 June 2025